

January 2017

Fellow Texas beekeepers,

Recognizing the many issues facing the beekeeping industry in Texas, TBA has made it a priority to update Chapter 131 of the Texas Agriculture Code, to better address the needs of the Texas beekeeping industry, today and in the future.



There have been laws regulating beekeeping in Texas since 1903. The last substantive revisions to Chapter 131 were made in 1983. There have been significant changes in the beekeeping industry in the past 30 plus years, and we believe that Chapter 131 must be updated to address these changes. Further, the growth of small-scale beekeepers in Texas has been tremendous over the past several years, and Chapter 131 fails in many ways to deal with the issues related to the needs of this important group.

TBA has been working on this process for more than two years. In July 2016, a meeting was held in College Station, where over twenty TBA members from all over the state, representing commercial, side-liner and small-scale beekeepers, came together in an advisory capacity. This diverse group was given the task of going through every section of the current law, analyzing current versus proposed changes, and discussing alternatives. Following that meeting, a smaller Committee was charged with incorporating the consensus of this advisory group into a document that could be presented to a legislator for drafting of a bill to be considered in the 2017 legislative session. House Bill 1293, sponsored by Representative Tracy King of Uvalde, has been filed and is available for your review on the TBA website. <http://texasbeekeepers.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2017-Proposed-AG131-for-2017-AGRICULTURE-CODE-2017-January-16.pdf>

Many of the changes proposed in HB 1293 simplify and update the current code. We believe other, more substantive changes, are positive for both Texas beekeepers and the Texas Apiary Inspection Service ("TAIS"), which is the agency responsible for safeguarding the apiary industry of Texas through health inspections and monitoring for new pests and diseases. Texas presents an especially challenging situation with 18 sea ports and a long border with Mexico through which potentially devastating bee pests, diseases, and unwanted species of bees may be brought into our state. The proposed changes will allow TAIS to better provide its essential functions of protecting the beekeeping industry, without imposing unnecessary burdens on beekeepers, and will allow TAIS to have greater ability to be pro-active in the education of Texas beekeepers with respect to identification, monitoring, mitigation, and treatment of bee diseases and pests. Simplifying and clarifying many provisions of the current law will make it much easier for beekeepers to understand and comply with the law, while allowances for small-scale and hobby beekeepers will bring the current law more in line with their needs and practices.

We want you to be fully informed about the proposed changes. In the coming weeks, TBA will make available a summary of the current law and the proposed changes to the law. Local TBA affiliated associations will be given additional information and a short presentation to provide additional explanation of the proposed changes. If you have questions or comments, please e-mail them to "131questions@texasbeekeepers.org." You will receive a prompt reply. Visit the TBA website at "texasbeekeepers.org" to download materials from the blog and read the latest news on HB 1293. Click on "subscribe" to be notified immediately when new updates are posted.

We solicit your support for HB 1293. As your state association, TBA strives to represent all Texas beekeepers – commercial, side-liners, small-scale, hobbyist, migratory, rural, and urban. That is a big challenge in a state as diverse as Texas. TBA's goal is to protect beekeepers and the beekeeping industry in Texas, not only in 2017, but well into the foreseeable future. We believe that passage of HB 1293 will be a positive step toward that reaching that goal.

Regards,

Chris Moore, President

Mark Hedley, Vice President

Leesa Hyder, Executive Secretary